Doing What You Can

(Luke 2:36-38)

Some years ago, Japan's women's national volleyball team had a player named Takeshita. In a sport where height is a tremendous advantage—many international players are over 190 cm, with some even surpassing 200 cm—she stood only 159 cm tall. Yet for many years she served as the team's setter, one of the most important positions.

The setter's role is to deliver the perfect toss to the attackers, reading the movements of both teammates and opponents, and making quick, accurate decisions. Despite her disadvantage in height, she persevered under heavy criticism, sometimes facing harsh public bashing. Through hard work, she not only succeeded but was even chosen one year as the world's best player. Truly, she was a "small giant."

There were others like her—short in stature yet shining in skill. Some played as liberos, excelling in defense. One player, Sato, stood only 153 cm, yet played magnificently. Watching such athletes, I was deeply moved by how they turned their so-called weaknesses into strengths for the sake of the team.

This principle applies not only in sports, but especially in the Church, which is the Body of Christ. In the Church, what the world may regard as weakness or deficiency can be transformed into vital strengths. Paul emphasizes this in 1 Corinthians 12: the less honorable parts of the body are indispensable, and the weaker parts are treated with special care.

The Church is not meant to be a gathering of the strong, the gifted, or the beautiful. It is meant to be a community where the weak are honored, and where even what seems unattractive is given purpose.

When churches aim primarily to become large and impressive, they risk losing their true nature. Growth itself is not wrong—the early Church grew rapidly—but they did not chase growth for its own sake. Their expansion was the byproduct of faithfully living as Christ's body in their time and place. In today's Japan, our situation is

different. We must accept that our churches may remain small. What matters is not size, but faithfulness: that the weak are valued, and that we continue to bear witness to Christ.

Think of Anna, the elderly widow in the temple when Jesus was born. Though she no longer had youth or beauty, she devoted herself to prayer and fasting, serving God with what strength she still had. Or think of older pastors whose voices and memories are failing, or women once active in service but now confined by age, or singers whose voices have grown weak. They still can pray—for others, for the Church, for God's glory. This too is precious service.

I remember a man of low intelligence who was often shunned by society. He could not perform complex work, but he could clean faithfully. For decades, from his youth to middle age, he joyfully cleaned the church toilets. Many members quietly supported him, and newcomers often remarked, "The toilets here are so clean—it impressed me deeply." Some even came to faith after experiencing his silent testimony. His service, more than many sermons, preached the gospel without words.

There are stories of CEOs secretly cleaning company restrooms to learn humility or to hear voices otherwise hidden. Those may be inspiring, but the greater truth is this: in both society and the Church, every person's gift matters when it is used rightly.

Therefore, let us neither overestimate nor underestimate ourselves. Do not stretch beyond your limits, but do not shrink back either. Be grateful for others, whether they seem greater or lesser than you. Above all, in the Body of Christ, let us cherish each person's God-given role.